Hostile Negotiations

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Hostile Negotiations

by TigerPrawn

Summary

Lecter Verger Corp plans to build a new mall in Wolf Trap, the only thing standing in their way is a local business owner and his fishing supplies store.

Chapter 1

Will Graham drew up the blinds, turned the open sign over on the door and looked out the window.

“Valentino’s?!” Will exclaimed, looking at the unit almost opposite on the strip, before turning back to look into his own shop.

Abigail was resting on her elbows at the shop counter, “Yeah, I know.” She sighed. “They moved out yesterday.”

Will let out a groan, he’d really been hoping the large bistro would hold out too. It was the biggest draw on the strip and with them gone it left Graham’s Bait & Hook as the one remaining shop that hadn’t sold up to make way for the new shopping mall that had been planned.

“Just us,” Abigail sighed, reading his thoughts.

“Don’t worry,” Will said, trying to sound brighter, trying to be positive for her. “We’re not going anywhere.”

She nodded and let out another sigh.

It made Will’s heart hurt. He had only ever wanted stability for Abigail, and this was the latest in a long string of bullshit in the way of that.

When her parents died, Abigail had been little more than a toddler, and the first and only child that his own parents ended up fostering.

For many years Will and his mom had been on the move, mostly around Louisiana, with his dad’s job. But then his grandfather had retired and they had returned to Wolf Trap to take over his store, and to expand their family. When his mom found she could no longer have children, fostering had seemed like a wonderful idea. Then they all fell in love with Abigail and couldn’t bear to see her placed with a different family, adopting her instead.

She’d been with them ten years when his mother died, and then his dad had slowly gone off the rails. Will was already away at college by the time things got really rough. Increasingly it had become clear that Bill Graham was no longer able to really care for Abigail, or keep the family business going.

After their years as a family, it had been a remarkably easy decision to come home to Wolf Trap. As far as he was concerned, Abigail was his sister, and with his dad in decline, he had to go home to look after her.

Will had boxed up his grade A essays and lab reports, and took over Bait & Hook. That had been three years ago, and in that time his dad had drunk himself into a care home, and Abigail’s grades had fluctuated more than he liked. The business, at least, had been booming.

Until eight months ago when some international conglomerate started buying up the area to build a mall.

Will had already thrown two representatives out of the shop, and he had no compunction about doing so until the end of time. Even if it meant they built the mall around him. He had given up too much to make this shop work for them, and he wasn’t about to let someone push him out.

Abi sighed again and picked up her book bag off the counter, “You coming to visit dad later?” She asked as she started towards the door.

Will nodded, “Yeah, but we’ll need to pick up dinner on the way home, then I’ll get groceries tomorrow.”

Abigail’s face lit up, “Pizza?”

“Sure, kiddo,” Will replied and ruffled her hair whilst she scowled at him for doing so, and then opened the door. He deliberately didn’t add *If the damn pizza shop hasn’t closed down*

too. Because that wasn't going to do either of them any good.

Abigail was heading out onto the street, on her way to school, when a man walked past her and into the shop before the door had even a chance to close.

Will was still standing there, his eyes immediately drawn to the sharp suit and briefcase. Will rolled his eyes. Another one of these idiots.

"No," Will said before turning and walking to the counter. He only turned back once he was behind it and gave the man a hard glare. "I don't want whatever you're offering. This place isn't for sale. At any price."

"Mr Graham, my name is Chilton, Fre-"

"No," Will cut him off again, "Don't care."

The suited man didn't seem perturbed, likely having heard of Will's hostility from previous attempts. He simply smiled and came forward, placing his briefcase on the counter. Will was sorely tempted to push it off the side.

"Yes, we are aware." The man replied in a clipped tone. "I have been tasked by the Lecter Verger Corporation with finding your price. Everyone has one, Mr Graham. Is it money? Your sister is due to start college next academic year, we believe. Perhaps you'd like the right strings pulled to get her into an Ivy League school? What is it we can do for you?"

The man gave him a smile Will had only ever seen before on a used car seller, and it did nothing but stoke the anger within him.

"Look, you can tell the Lecter Verger people that I am not interested. And that I'm sick of them sending idiots like you here." At that Will did push the briefcase onto the floor.

The man let out a heavy sigh and picked it up.

"Mr Graham I don't think you understand, there are ways and means around this. If they so wanted, my employers could have this shop levelled by the end of the week. But they are trying to be considerate to yourself and the other local businesses. You already are aware that all the businesses on this strip will be given units within the mall as part of the deal."

Will scoffed at the idea and shook his head again. "My grandfather built this place with his own two hands. My family's blood, sweat and tears are ingrained in this building, I'm not moving my business into some soulless box in a damn mall that this town doesn't even need! You can level this building with me still in it and see how that works out for you." Will growled the words.

The man practically rolled his eyes, which gave Will the urge to punch him in the face, but he restrained himself.

"I'll come back next week, Mr Graham. And that will be our final attempt. Our last offer. Think over what it is you would like us to offer you."

“Huh, whatever. Look, I couldn’t give a shit if it’s you or a Verger, or Jesus Christ himself, my answer isn’t going to change.” Will started around the counter, intending to escort the man out, which was apparently clear as he started moving quickly to the door of his own volition whilst Will ranted. “In fact, get one of those Lecter Verger people here in person. I won’t talk to anyone else. I want a head honcho, so I can explain to them once and for all exactly how far up their ass they can shove their offer.”

The man snorted, and Will opened the door, holding it in his shaking hand until the man was outside again. And then he slammed it so hard the glass almost shattered. If it had, he’d have sent the damn bill to Lecter Verger Corp.

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It had been a long week.

Their dad hadn’t been doing too well, his mind had started to go a while back and some days he really couldn’t get things straight at all. It upset Abigail and now Will had barely seen her in days. The only reason he knew she was going to school was because they hadn’t called him to notify him of truancy.

Will was looking forward to closing up for the night, getting them a takeout and then having a couple of glasses of whiskey before bed. At the weekends he let his assistant manager run the shop, so whilst he tended to go in during fly fishing season if it got busy, he otherwise had that time to himself. Not that it didn’t mean he wouldn’t be working. There was always something that needed fixing around the old house.

If he was lucky he might get to take the boat out on the lake to just hang a rod over the side and take a nap in the sun on Sunday afternoon.

It was ten minutes before closing when Will started towards the door. No one had been in for almost an hour, so he didn’t feel particularly bothered about shutting a few minutes early.

He was almost at the door when it opened, startling him a little.

“Shit,” Will exclaimed, his hand clutching at his chest, wondering if he was too young for a heart attack.

The man coming in through the door stopped, equally as startled to see someone right there in front of him. He blinked a couple of times, as though Will’s very existence was a surprise to him.

This was clearly not a customer.

The man was a hair taller than Will and wore a tailored suit that was not usual fair in Wolf Trap. His hair was styled neatly back and Will was sure he could cut something on those cheekbones. All in all, he was a striking looking man.

He was also, oddly familiar. It wasn’t the rather distinctive look, so much as the man’s eyes. Despite their brown-red depths, they were cold. And that rang some distant bell in Will’s

mind.

In the silent moment, that recognition seemed to be reflected, and then quashed as the man cleared his throat.

“I’m here in person now, Mr Graham. As you requested. Perhaps now we can discuss your price?” The suave European accent wasn’t a total surprise. Probably the man’s entire aesthetic gave it away, Will assumed.

Will cocked a brow and chuckled, “Ha, no thanks.” He continued towards the door, making an ushering motion as though to kick the man out, but he didn’t budge. “I didn’t think your lackey would take me seriously about getting one of you honchos here. He could have just passed on the message - you can stick it up your ass.”

The man’s mouth twitched into a very slight, rueful smile. “Yes, we received your message. You made quite the impression on Frederick. I have to admit that his relating of your encounter made me keen to come and see you in person, as requested.”

Will huffed again, and shook his head. “It’s not mutual. And I’m trying to close up.”

“Of course, I wouldn’t want to detain you.” The man started back a step towards the door and then stopped. Very deliberately turning back to Will. “That said, I’m here now and will be in town for several days. I have many meetings, however, perhaps you might be free for dinner tomorrow night? To discuss this situation we find ourselves in, a business dinner, of course.”

There was a tease there that made Will’s blood boil. They had all clearly done their research on him and Abigail, probably the whole family. Of course this man knew he was gay, and now was being an asshole about it. Like he’d ever want some prick like this guy to date him?! Or, maybe Will was being defensive as usual, but wouldn’t think anyone would blame him in this case.

Will decided to skip the point, despite sorely wanting to ask why the hell he thought Will would think it would be anything other than business?! Instead, he simply said, “No thanks.”

The man chuckled, his hand moving to the door handle, a step closer to leaving at least.

“Mr Graham, I’ve come all this way at your request. The least you can do is join me for dinner so that we can discuss this like adults. I will respect your decision either way, as long as you allow me to make my position clear.”

Will let out a mirthless chuckle of his own, “Riiiight. The position that you’re going to force me out anyway, regardless of anything I have to say?”

“Yes,” The man admitted, no change in emotion in his expression or tone. “But I’d rather not. I’d like us to reach an understanding. Bad feeling is bad business. It’s not how I want to start our venture in this town.”

Will huffed again and shook his head.

The man moved his free hand into his inner pocket and pulled out a card, handing it to Will between two fingers.

Will reached out automatically, and then it was too late to draw his hand back without it seeming like defeat, so he took the card. He had a mind to just rip it up in front of the man, but when he placed his fingers on it, the man didn't let go. Their fingers touched for a brief moment and caused Will to look up sharply, wondering why the man didn't just let the card go.

He was staring at Will. No, gazing was perhaps the better word. He seemed to be searching Will's expression for something. In response, Will's face crumpled practically into a snarl, and the man released the card.

"You have my details. Unless I hear from you that there is an emergency detaining you, I will send a car for you here at six tomorrow evening." He opened the door and stepped back outside, pausing a moment, he turned back and said, "Good night, Will."

Will blinked as the man walked out and got into the chauffeur driven Bentley out front of the store.

He had the strangest tingling sensation up his spine. One that he wanted to believe was anger and frustration, but he wasn't entirely sure of that.

Will closed the door, locked it and let out a heavy sigh. He looked down at the card in his hand.

Hannibal Lecter
CEO - Lecter Verger Corporation

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will realises where he recognises Hannibal from...

Will's anger was only equalled by his bafflement at one of the CEOs actually coming to the town, as he had belligerently requested. And that much must have shown on his face when Abigail gave him a curious look as she entered the kitchen.

He was cooking them dinner, and the smell had drawn her down from her room. She seemed a little brighter, for now. Their dad was only going to decline further, and when he finally died things would be hard. If they lost the shop as well? He couldn't even imagine it. It would crush them both, but Abigail especially would struggle. She'd already been through so much in her short life.

"What's up?" Abigail asked, settling at the stool on the opposite side of the counter Will was preparing the food on.

"Nothing, just. A business meeting. Tomorrow night. You okay to get yourself dinner? Or I can leave pizza money?"

She raised a brow at that, and then waved a dismissive hand, "I can look after myself you know."

"I know," He smiled, "But I like taking care of my baby sister. Soon you'll be off to college and I'll miss having you around."

Abigail chuckled and shook her head, something that warmed his heart. "You goof. So, what's the business meeting."

"It's, uh, about the shop. Nothing to worry about. Just someone who wants to discuss options."

"Selling options?" She frowned.

"Not as far as I'm concerned." Will replied with a playful huff. She was reassured and smiled.

A few moments of silence passed and Abigail got up and made herself busy with fetching cutlery and water for them, setting the little dining table.

Will went back to the veggies, his thoughts drifting to Lecter. He was so familiar.

Creepily so. Like deja vu. Like he'd seen him in a dream and it turned out he was real.

The more likely explanation was that Will had seen him in a magazine or something. In fact, he recalled then that the corporation had sent a brochure around to all the businesses about the development. Maybe his photo had been in there? That would make sense.

Will made a mental note to see if he could find the brochure after dinner. He was sure it ended up in his pile of newspapers to use for putting dirty engine parts on when he was tinkering on boat engines. He'd check in his workshop in daylight, but he was assured that must absolutely be where he recognised the man from.

It must have been a damn good photo, to so perfectly capture the man's eyes. Will could see them now, so intense. Just as they had been when he'd seen them before. Wherever that had been.

Hours later dinner was eaten, the kitchen was clean, and Will could hear Abigail's gentle snoring. He popped his head around her door and found she'd fallen asleep reading. He let out a fond huff and then went on into her room. Will picked up the book and marked the page before setting it on the nightstand and pulling her blankets up a little. He turned the light off on his way out and remembered her as a small child. She had been such a wonderful addition to their family. The sibling he'd needed.

Will had always been an oddball, a bit of a misfit. Never in one place long enough to settle back before they moved to Wolf Trap. It made it hard for him to even learn how to make friends. He and Abigail had been an instant family from the moment they met, and Will wasn't about to let some damn corporation tear their family from its livelihood, it's own history!

Will retired to his own room feeling exhausted. He didn't want to keep having this fight. Months and months as each business around him had closed, he'd had to fight all the harder. Even many of the townsfolk were now saying he should close up, that the fight was already lost. But he couldn't accept that. And that was why he had to go to this damn dinner.

It felt like a final stand.

Will grabbed the large glass of whiskey that he'd set beside his bed, sitting on the edge of his bed before taking a swig. It burned and there was something reassuring in that feeling. In the familiar sensation. He knew he needed to cut back, he didn't want to end up like his dad over this whole mess. It was too easy to find himself with a tumbler in hand every evening.

But tonight, after his encounter with Lecter, he knew he wasn't going to sleep without something to make him at least a little drowsy.

He drank down the rest and pulled off his shirt, standing then to strip down to his boxers before climbing into the cool sheets.

As predicted, it took quite some time to fall asleep, and when he did his dreams were full of weird times and places. One moment he was in his shop and then it was his lunch break and he was in the diner just off campus that he used to go to. The dream continued, a strange mashup of the here and now, and his life back at university. At least until he had dropped out and moved home.

In the dream, at first, it hadn't seemed odd that these two time periods had merged. But as he dropped his books in his dorm room, to head to work at his shop, it was starting to feel discombobulated.

Will was tossing and turning as confusion started to grip him. Not a nightmare, but a strangeness to the dream that made it anxiety inducing.

Then he was leaving the shop to go fishing. Rod in hand. But when he reached the stream, it wasn't the stream. It was the Patapsco River and Will wasn't carrying a rod, he was carrying his samples case. Bev Katz walked past him, teasing him about being a bug boy, then winking at him to show she didn't mean it. They lagged behind, the other students up ahead. The small group of them on the residential school for the summer during his sophomore year. He'd earned a scholarship for his place on it.

The memories brought a shuddering breath through Will, a tightness to his throat. A regret he couldn't own.

And then, loud music and flashing lights and a DJ playing in the kitchen. Back home again, but not home. No, he was somewhere else entirely. Somewhere...

Will sat bolt upright in bed, panting and sweating. He gulped down a few breaths as he blinked, shaking at the emotions his dreams had weighted him with. He gripped the sheets and tried to still himself, his mind racing as he tried to catch hold of the fading dream. Tried to bring back the memories that were fast escaping him.

Will blinked, his breath levelling out, but his heart still racing. It didn't matter that the dream was fading.

He knew where he had seen Lecter before.

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The car arrived promptly at six.

Will kept it waiting whilst he retired to the bathroom and had a quick wash and changed his t-shirt for the second time that afternoon. He had already freshened up and changed a little after half five, but the thought of the evening ahead had him sweating enough to change again.

Unfortunately he hadn't brought more clothes, so he changed from the half decent button up, into one of the spare polo shirts, complete with store logo, that he had in the stock room. They were for the occasional external event then ran stalls at. And whilst clean, it was a little musty from having been sat in a box.

At least the material didn't wrinkle or crease.

It was ten after six when Will locked up the store. It was the chauffeur driven Bentley that had come for him and it turned out that he was the only passenger, the driver looking at his watch and then smirking at Will,

Apparently someone appreciated his tardiness.

"Mr Lecter doesn't like being kept waiting," The driver informed him as he climbed into the car. It was amusement rather than a scald and Will replied with a non committal grunt.

He was actually glad that Lecter wasn't in the car in some ways, and yet not in others, which surprised him. Part of him was eager to see the man, if only to look into those eyes again and confirm his suspicions. But of course, the reason for their meeting hung heavy over him,

As soon as the car left the outskirts of Wolf Trap, Will knew where they were going, a little thrill rolling through him. The only hotels in the town were small and quaint, not what Lecter was surely used to. So it wasn't a surprise to find that he was actually staying at a grand hotel in Tysons, the more built up town past the Westwood Country Club. Nor that they would be dining at the hotel's five star restaurant.

When they pulled up outside, a concierge came out and opened the door.

It was exactly the sort of flashy that he knew he should have expected from someone from Lecter Verger Corp. Despite the expectation Will still rolled his eyes as he was directed into the hotel's fancy restaurant and then over to Lecter's table.

Lecter stood as Will approached, looking rather tarted up in a fancy suit. Will refused to feel self conscious about what he was wearing, despite the fact that he was turning the heads of the other diners. Will stiffly shook the offered hand and they both sat.

Will found himself muttering, "Sorry, wardrobe malfunction." by way of explanation as a few eyes lingered on rather noticeably on him.

Lecter waved the comment away, "It's not exactly black tie here." He smiled reassuringly and Will let out a little chuckle.

"You wouldn't think it from the stares."

"Oh, they are merely taken with your beauty." Lecter teased, signalling for the waiter. Will was glad the man looked away then because his cheek's heated rather involuntarily.

Maybe it wasn't just the words? Maybe it was the memories that had come back to him?

And yes, now that they sat opposite each other, Will could see his memories matched those eyes.

When they locked back on his, Will shuddered and he tried his damndest to hide it. Flashes of memory came back unbidden and Will felt heat beneath his collar. Suddenly glad he hadn't worn the button up as he'd have been creating sweat patches by now.

Not just from the memories, but something it took him a moment to put his finger on.

Anger.

He was angry that Lecter didn't recognise him. Which was unfair, he knew, as it had taken a rather odd dream to jog his own memory. Will hid his ire behind sipping from his glass of water whilst Hannibal asked for the wine menu.

Will kept his eyes down as they ordered drinks and their food, Hannibal insisting on picking up the bill. Will scoffed, no intention of refusing it, considering this was a business meeting. He considered ordering the most expensive thing on the menu just to be spiteful.

When their drinks arrived, Will drank half of his whiskey down before taking a deep breath and saying, "You wanted to talk, let's talk. Convince me I want to sell to you, because from where I'm sitting nothing has changed. You won't get me out of my shop no matter what the offer."

His words received a very amused twerk of Lecter's lips, a slight smile that Will was sure was at his expense.

Will cocked a brow and tried not to sneer. Regardless of the images and feelings his memory supplied, this man was here to destroy his family business. And Will wasn't about to let that happen.

"I had hoped we could get to know each other a little first, I always prefer to do business with friends." Lecter replied. There was a softness to his tone and the smile seemed to turn genuine, which actually aggravated Will.

"Rather than enemies?" Will taunted, amusement giving way to something a little darker.

"I wouldn't say that." Lecter drawled. It was the way he looked at Will then, that made Will narrow his eyes.

"You moved to Baltimore as a child?" Will asked, sharply. "Always lived there?"

Lecter blinked, caught off guard for a moment before his expression settled again and he lifted an amused brow. "Actually, no. After my parents died in Lithuania, I went to live with my uncle in Paris. He moved us here when I was nineteen. I suppose I could have stayed in Paris at that age, been my own man. But he wanted to teach me about the family business. And the headquarters were moving to Baltimore."

"The Lecter Verger Corporation," Will noted.

"Back then it was simply Lecter Brothers UAB, the reason for our move was the merger with the Vergers." Lecter advised, pleasantly.

Will nodded. "So you went to university in Baltimore." He pushed.

"Yes, I did." Lecter's eyes narrowed with amused curiosity. "You appear more interested in me than I had expected."

Will huffed and shook his head, gritting his teeth before pushing even further, "You liked to spend your Friday nights at Club Charles."

There was a beat. A moment of silence before Lecter relaxed back in his chair, giving Will an appraising look. And then replied, “You know I did, Will.”

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Lecter’s words, his acknowledgement, had sent a shiver over Will.

Had he known all along who Will was? Will should feel bad that he hadn’t remembered sooner, or made the connection at some point prior to meeting the man, but instead he felt betrayed.

He didn’t stop to discuss it further. The thought that Lecter might have remembered their acquaintance this whole time and had been playing some sort of damn game, made his throat tighten. He clenched his jaw to stop himself from saying something that might cause a scene.

Not that he cared much on that front. He just didn’t want to be belligerent in front of potential customers - the waitstaff more than the patrons. He limited himself then, to just standing, throwing his napkin onto the place setting that was yet to even see any food.

Without a word he turned and walked out.

Of course, he was there without a car. And the thought of stopping to ask the concierge to order him a taxi might give Lecter the chance to catch up with him. So instead Will walked out of the hotel and pulled out his phone. He was part of the way home when Abigail got to him in the truck and collected him.

They drove the rest of the way home in silence.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Time to strike a deal...

Will would have been lying to himself to say that he hadn't expected someone from Lecter Verger Corp to turn up during the working day with some sort of eviction notice after what had happened. It was only a matter of time before they bought the land from under him and tore down the shop, that seemed certain.

But no one came.

It left his nerves jangling after the night before, there was nothing left to be said between them.

At two minutes to five, Will went to shut the shop door, only to find, once more, Lecter walking through it.

"Will," Lecter addressed as he walked in, closing the door behind him before Will had the chance.

"Mr Graham," Will corrected.

That tugged a smile at Lecter's lips, "Of course." He agreed, inclining his head.

"Look, Lecter-" Will started but Lecter cut him off by raising a hand.

"Hannibal, please."

There was a tease in his tone and his eyes sparkled. It infuriated Will but he said nothing, not rising to the bait.

"Look, there's nothing left to talk about. I don't want to sell, you're going to force me out. We've reached an impasse." Will growled.

"Hmm, maybe so." Lecter conceded, following as Will started back to the counter.

Will moved behind the counter, putting the barrier between them, pushing his glasses up his nose.

Lecter let out a sigh, "I don't want to play games with you, *Mister Graham.*" Lecter assured him, his expression a little more serious.

Will huffed. What else could this be but a game now? Now that they remembered each other.

"You're fond of games." Will bit out the words.

Lecter frowned, taken aback for a moment.

"How so?"

Will huffed again, "Don't pretend you don't remember." Will snapped. "You led me on. I went home with you and I… I thought that there was something. I should have known better. You didn't even tell me your name!"

Lecter raised a brow at that. "You didn't tell me yours either. If I remember correctly, we were both too busy with other matters."

Will's cheeks flushed. He wasn't wrong. They had met at the bar, Lecter had chatted him up and Will had been flattered by the attention. They had ended up kissing in the bar, and when Lecter had invited him home, Will hadn't even considered refusing.

"I asked your name," Will countered. "You told me that we would have time for details later, you… You let me think you were interested. That we had time for details because it was the start of something. I felt…"

Will trailed off. Not wanting to admit to what he had felt. That they had clicked and that he had believed they would wake the next morning in each other's arms and go from there. Dating and more. And… none of that had happened. It had just been that one night.

The night Will had completely fallen for the nameless stranger.

Lecter cleared his throat and began to speak softly, "I didn't tell you because I wanted to know that you liked me for me, not for my name or money. The merger had been in the papers for weeks, it would have been easy to connect me. To use me."

Will let out a mirthless chuckle, "So you used me instead. One night, after making me think you wanted more, that it was the start of something."

Lecter raised a brow at that and then released a heavy sigh, "That… had not been my intention, but on reflection-"

"We made love, not fucking. No not that. We made love and then in the morning I woke in your empty bed. In your empty apartment and let myself out. Weeks later I finally see you again in Club Charles and you're chatting up someone else." Will balled his fists and felt the strain from clenching his jaw, "Do you have any idea how that made me feel?!"

"Will," Lecter released his name on a sigh and stepped closer. If the counter hadn't been between them, Will was sure Lecter would have reached out to touch him. "It was not my intent, there were… extenuating circumstances, an unexpected appointment. I left you a note-
"

"There wasn't a note," Will snapped.

"On the bedside table. Asking you to stay until I returned. I found it on the floor and assumed that you didn't wish to take it beyond that evening." Lecter glared at Will, and Will saw the warmth in his eyes. So long had he remembered the cold ones that would stare at him from across the bar at Club Charles, after that evening together.

Now he realised he had been seeing hurt there. He had hurt Lecter.

"I didn't see the note." Will allowed, his heart breaking a little. What if he had? What would have been different? He shook his head, "None of this matters. That's all in the past and now you want to build a mall on top of my family livelihood."

"Will," Lecter began to counter.

"Just… Just get out. Have your lawyers do what they need to do. You can damn well bulldoze the place with me still in it." Will replied, angrily. He moved back around the counter, going to the door and holding it open for Lecter to leave.

Lecter followed, but stopped when he drew level with Will, "It was never meant to just be one night. Not for me. I left you a note." Lecter said, solemnly.

"Fuck your note," Will growled.

Lecter looked defeated. He looked wounded.

Will wanted to say that it didn't hurt.

Lecter reached the door, Will moving to close it behind him, but Lecter turned to say something more and Will jarred to a halt. The sudden stop left him off balance and falling into Lecter.

He was caught in strong arms that felt more familiar than he would have liked.

Will frowned and started to right himself, started to pull back. And then looked up.

Their eyes locked and for a long moment they simply gazed at each other. Seeing everything they had seen that night in college. The promise of what could be between them. The desire.

"Will," Lecter uttered his name a hair's breadth from Will's lips. And then they were both pressing forward and their lips met.

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Will lay in bed staring at the ceiling.

He had pushed Lecter away. Thrown him out of the shop.

And now he lay in bed, achingly hard, his hand tempted to stray down below his shorts, wondering if he’d done the right thing.

His cock said no. His morning wood strained in a way that was almost unbearable to ignore.

But he knew it was completely the right thing to do. He couldn't let lust and the memories of that one amazing night years ago, colour his thoughts on what was happening here.

If they'd fucked, nothing would have changed.

Will sighed and hauled himself from bed and into a cold shower, still having to resist stroking himself as the water helped ease his aching cock. He wasn't going to give into temptation and jerk off thinking about that night from college. Or the kiss they had just shared the day before. Or Hannibal Lecter in general.

Despite how attracted to the man he still was. And now with the story about the note? Will wasn't sure whether he was coming or going and either way, it had all been so long ago.

Even so, Will was in a complete daze for most of the morning. He rang up the wrong price on a couple of items, and nearly skewered his thumb on a lure.

Maybe he should have jerked off? Maybe that was something to consider for later.

The thought lingered in his mind, feeling more inescapable as the hours passed.

And then the door opened a little after lunch, and in walked Hannibal Lecter.

Will's cock twitched. His chest ached. His lips curled into a snarl.

"There's no reason for you to come back here." Will growled at the man.

Lecter said nothing as he approached the counter, and when he got closer, Will could see the dark circles under his eyes. He looked a little pale, a little drawn. And Will had to wonder whether the man had gotten any sleep the night before.

"I don't wish to impose upon you any longer." Lecter's tone was cold. His eyes cold and distant again. Not those warm ones Will remembered from that opulent bedroom so many years ago.

Will hated it.

"Okay," He replied, softer than he had wanted to.

"I would like another meeting. I have rented a business suite at my hotel, perhaps that would be a more appropriate location."

"To discuss?" Will frowned. Surely they'd said everything. And whilst he sort of felt sorry for Lecter as he looked at him now, this was still the man about to destroy his family business.

"A change to the plans concerning the proposed mall. One that might be more to your liking." Lecter's tone was level and cool.

"You're saying you aren't going to bulldoze my shop?" Will asked, a cocked brow of disbelief.

“I’m saying that I’d like to discuss it further. That I might have had a change of heart.”

“Pfft,” Will blew out a breath and folded his arms. “That’s a pretty big claim when you’ve already ousted the rest of the strip. And I can’t help but feel your change of interest is down to me, to us.”

Will waggled his finger between them, indicating them as a pair.

“I assure you that isn’t strictly the case. Beyond having become reacquainted with you, made me realise the value of humans in business.”

“What the fuck does that even mean?” Will asked, trying not to roll his eyes at how pretentious the man was. Before Lecter could answer, Will narrowed his eyes, considering the words. Value of humans? “Why do I feel like I’m going to be propositioned? If we fuck around you’ll consider not bulldozing my family’s livilhood.”

The words came out in the heat of the moment, and Will instantly regretted them. Lecter’s expression was one of shock and a little sneer appeared ever so briefly. He knew then, he had truly offended the man. And a week ago he wouldn’t have given a single fuck about that.

Ignoring the insinuation that he was asking Will to whore himself, Lecter simply replied, “I keep my private and personal lives separate.”

“Shit, I…” Will started and then stopped himself. Clenching his jaw, he had no wish to apologise, even if he knew he probably should. They were beyond apologies at this point.

“I leave in two days. You have my number.” The words were a low growl that sent a shiver up Will’s spine. Lecter was mad at him, and Will couldn’t blame him.

Will didn’t bother to tell the man he threw his card out, he just watched him go, the shop door swinging closed behind him.

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“What’s with you?” Abigail asked, dumping her bookbag on the counter and cocking her head at Will.

He stood with the pricing gun in hand and a whole bunch of dried bait bagged up waiting to be priced and shelved. In fact, he must have been standing that way for a hell of a while, considering Abigail was now home.

“Pricing.” He replied and then looked down and pressed the trigger, expelling the first label onto the waiting bag and realising immediately he hadn’t changed the price from the last stock he’d sorted. “Damn,” Will muttered and began to change the dial to get the right numbers loaded.

“Here,” Abi took it from his hands and started to do it for him. “What’s going on with you, Will? You’ve been weird since that night I picked you up from the roadside. Did… Did something happen?”

He had claimed to Abi that it had been a business meeting and that he had walked out. Which was the truth, mostly. And she had assumed that he had actually gone on a date and was being cagey. That much was clear from the furtive grins and a few comments.

It could have been a date, Will considered. Had things been different.

The thought made him clench his jaw and he let out a huffed breath without even realising it.

“Will!” Abi scalded, “Don’t be all secretive on me. You know I don’t like it.”

Her bright eyes pleaded with him, and he instantly felt like the worst person in the world. He hated upsetting her, and this was such a stupid thing to let her get upset over.

“I promise, Abi. It’s nothing bad. I just… I had a meeting with Lecter, the CEO I mean. From Lecter Verger Corp. And… it didn’t go well.” He said the words carefully, not entirely sure how much he wanted to say.

“Will, I love you. But let’s be realistic,” She began, in a defeated tone. “You’ve been amazing. You’ve continued to stand strong when everyone else crumbled. But… this Mall is getting built. Whether we like it or not.”

Will let out a heavy sigh and slumped against the counter, letting his head fall into his hands.

“Wh-what aren’t you telling me?” Abi asked cautiously.

Will took in a deep breath. His chest hurt.

“I know him, Lecter. I didn’t place him at first, but then we both knew… Um, we hooked up in college. And, it didn’t end well.”

“Shit. What? I don’t… what?” Abigail shook her head and frowned. “You dated?”

“No,” Will let out a mirthless chuckle. “Nope. Not dated. We hooked up in a bar and had, um. We had a great night together and I thought that it would be more but it wasn’t. And…” He trailed off. Because the story in his head no longer matched reality and it was hard to align the two. He shook his head.

“I thought he used me, wasn’t interested. But he told me the other day that he left a note. I didn’t see it, but he said there was a note asking me to stay and instead I left and he thought I wasn’t interested. And…”

“Holy… Will, this is like the worst rom-com trope ever.” She sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose in that way that made him think that she sometimes seemed like the oldest of the two of them. “And now he’s come to destroy the family business?”

There was a silent and sarcastic, *what are the odds*, implied at the end. As though this really were some terrible Hallmark movie, probably set at Christmas.

“I don’t know what he’s going to do.” Will replied, grumpy and dismissive. “He came by the other day and said that he might have something else in mind, but I just… I don’t want him to play games with me. Like he did…” Will trailed off, realising that Lecter never had played games with him when they’d hooked up. That was down to blanks he’d filled in when things had worked out how they had.

“He’s not going to build the mall?” Abi asked, frowning and equal parts concerned and enthused. “He said this the other day? So… the day you started moping around the place like an idiot.” There was another implication there, that there had been more to the discussion, which of course there had been. But then Abi waved her hand, dismissing that train as though she didn’t have time for it.

“What did he actually say, Will?”

“That he’d had a change of heart and wanted to discuss it further.” Will replied, coolly.

Abigail’s expression flitted over elation and landed on sceptical, her gaze narrowing. “And what did he want in return?”

Will was glad that at least he hadn’t been alone in inferring that. But he shook his head.

“Uhuh, no. He didn’t want… He wasn’t saying…” Will huffed out a breath and closed his eyes. “I should have talked to him shouldn’t I? About the possible change in plans?”

“Maybe?” Abi replied, gently. She placed a hand over his and squeezed. “You, um, want to call him? Arrange a meeting?” She didn’t push, instead her tone was one of support.

Will shook his head, “Can’t. He said he was leaving. He probably checked out of the hotel this morning.”

“You have his number?” Abi did push a little then.

“No, I, um. I threw it out.” He admitted.

“Will!” Abigail might as well have stamped her foot. “Ugh. Okay, well… maybe call the hotel? Or go there, see if he’s still there and can spare five minutes over coffee.”

“I don’t know Abi…” Will started but she glared at him.

“You’ve been fighting all this time to keep the shop going, and now you might have the chance to sway the deal. You can’t give up on that Will. Not just because you guys banged in college.” Abi near shouted, her arms flailing as she spoke.

It would have been amusing under other circumstances.

Will looked at the clock on the wall. It was a little after four. If Lecter had had more meetings then maybe he might still be at the hotel?

Will let out a heavy sigh and grabbed the keys to his truck.

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Will only realised when he reached the reception desk, that he was wearing one of the old, worn, too-thin t-shirts that he only wore on stock days, and had a couple of pricing stickers stuck to him. The receptionist looked him over, her eyes lingering on his chest - his all too visible nipples - before she met his eyes with a raised brow.

“Can I help you?”

“I’m, uh… Has Hannibal Lecter checked out yet?” Will asked with a wince.

She scrunched her nose, an apologetic expression, before replying, “Sorry, sir, we can’t give out details about hotel guests.”

“I just want…” Will started, and then trailed off. It wasn’t her fault, and he should have considered that before coming. “Okay, I understand. Is it okay if I just peek into the restaurant? See if he’s there?”

She eyed him again and the apologetic look was back. Will for sure wasn’t dressed for the restaurant.

He shook his head and held up his hands in placation before starting back towards the front doors, not wanting to cause her trouble. He’d see if there was some number he could call on the company website, though it all seemed futile now.

As Will reached the heavy, revolving door, he stepped forward and felt the impact of something barrelling into him.

Will tumbled backwards, for sure he was going to land on his ass, but then arms grabbed him and held him suspended like a dip in a dance.

“I’m sorry, I was rushing and not looking where I-”

Lecter stopped apologising when he realised it was Will in his arms.

Will couldn’t catch his breath and once more they were gazing at each other.

It wasn’t until Lecter set him back on his feet that Will said, “I just wanted to talk. About the mall and… everything. Maybe we should talk about everything.”

Lecter gave a slight smile and nod.

They both stood in silence for a moment before Will said, “I thought you might have checked out.”

“I had planned to.” Lecter replied, a little hurriedly. “But a change in plans has meant a few more meetings. I will be here through the weekend now.” Lecter raised his arm in a gesture towards the bank of lifts. “Shall we go up to a meeting room?”

“Um…” Will swallowed and began to walk as directed. The thought of being in a formal environment, given the fact that he knew there were personal issues they should address, didn’t sit well with Will. “Can we go to your room?”

Lecter looked briefly startled and then blinked, “If you’d be more comfortable, then of course.”

Will inclined his head ever so slightly and was spared having to give a further answer, by the elevator doors opening.

They both stepped in and Lecter pressed the button for one of the top floors. Will wasn’t surprised to find it was a luxury suite, and there was a part of him that was galled by that. The part of him that wanted to hate Lecter, not just for the mall, but for that night they’d had. For all the years after that he had felt worthless and abandoned.

It was so hard to let go of those feelings, even now after Lecter had explained. And Will had believed him.

When they entered the suite, Lecter moved to the drinks cabinet and indicated for Will to take a seat on the plush sofa.

“What can I get you?”

“Just water, actually. If that’s okay.” Will replied, not wanting anything that could impair him at all when there was so much to discuss.

Lecter nodded and fixed them a glass each before taking a seat on an armchair opposite Will.

“I should-”

“Can I-”

They both started and then stopped. Lecter let out a light chuckle and Will sighed, trying to smile.

“You first, please Will.” Lecter said.

“I should just tell you I believe you. About the note. I know it doesn’t mean anything now. And, I’m not going to lie, I’ve been holding onto a lot of hurt over that night. Hurt that now appears to have been misplaced. So, I’m sorry for that I guess. But… That doesn’t change anything now. You’re still trying to take my life from me. My business. My… It’s my family business.”

Lecter frowned at that, apparently trying to choose his words. “You’ve given me a lot to think about, Will. When I recognised you I didn’t think it mattered. But I realised, the more we spoke, how much I had also been holding onto from that night.” Lecter looked away for a moment and then back, determined. “I thought you had rejected me. And I have to admit, that has coloured my interactions with people over the years. Perhaps it even made me more ruthless than I needed to be.”

They were both silent for a moment.

“I’m not going to build the mall.”

“What?” Will blinked and reeled ever so slightly back in his chair. “What do you… I don’t….”

Lecter shook his head. “I had never really considered before, the human cost of things. The value beyond the bottom line. I thought that anyone not accepting a generous monetary offer *and* a new unit, was foolish. Until I met you, again. And remembered there used to be more to business than that. When my father was alive, before the merger.”

Lecter stood and walked to the window, his back to Will.

“I don’t want to take your family business from you.”

“That’s… I mean, I’m happy about that. But, Hannibal, isn’t that going to cost you a lot of money?” Will hated to be concerned about that but found he couldn’t help it. He felt like he had some responsibility in this and he didn’t want the man’s resentment down the line.

Lecter shook his head. “Not if my alternative plans are accepted by the Board.”

“And those are?” Will lead.

Lecter turned back and looked at Will for a moment before finally answering, “To instead invest in the strip mall. I will sell the shops back to those who sold them, at a discounted rate. And then, instead of building over them, I’d like to develop the existing area. Renovate the businesses, invest in the area as a whole.”

“I… That’s…” Will blinked. “That’s okay.” He finally managed.

Lecter’s lips twitched into a grin.

*

They had talked a little more, mostly around the sorts of business community there already was in place, and how Lecter Verger Corp could support that rather than impress their own.

Will couldn’t help but be a little excited about the whole thing. Not just because he was getting to keep his shop, but because the whole area was going to have the injection of cash it had needed ever since the global recession.

When the conversation came to a natural end, Will guessed it was time to go.

There was nothing else to say right now, and there were no other reasons Will could think to stay.

Or at least, not ones that he should consider.

Regardless of what had happened before, the misunderstanding with the letter, the situation over the mall and now Lecter's change of heart. It wouldn't be appropriate, Will felt, to let anything happen between them.

Despite the ease of their conversations, especially when they had rambled off into non-business territory. And the way they held each other's eyes just a little too long. There was too much of a mess between them to allow for anything other than business.

Will drank down the last of his water, placed down the glass and then rubbed his hands on his legs. "Well, guess I should get going." Will stood. "You probably had other plans t-"

"No, I didn't." Hannibal quickly interjected and got to his feet. There was a keen look in his eyes and that coldness had gone again.

They both stood for a moment, gazing at each other.

Will's heart thundered in his chest and it was impossible to ignore the chemistry between them. The same chemistry that he'd felt that night in college. When he had assumed he would wake the next day to find that there was something there, something worth pursuing.

Even so, when Hannibal reached out and stepped into Will's space, Will stepped back and held up his hands.

"No, I don't think-"

"I apologise. I'm so sorry, Will. I had believed… It doesn't matter what I believed, this was inappropriate of me." Hannibal looked contrite and it made Will hurt all the more.

"No, you didn't get it wrong. I just… Don't think it's a good idea. I don't think we should…" Will trailed off and swallowed, looking at the man in front of him. Feeling that pull from years before.

He had spent so long blanking the whole thing out that he hadn't even really recognised the hot guy from the bar, and this done up businessman as being the same person. But now he could see it, and it hurt.

Not because he still believed he had been rejected back then, not even at the thought of all the time they had lost that they could never get back, but because of this new situation.

"If you're going to have a business interest in the local business community, which includes *my* business, I don't think it would be a good idea for us to… act on… whatever this is." Will found the words hard to get out.

"So you're saying, by doing as you wish and not building the mall, I lose you." Hannibal reiterated rather than asked.

Will gave a nod, "I guess I am. And if you build the mall I'll never forgive you."

"It seems we are in a zero-sum game." Hannibal clenched his jaw.

Will sighed, and replied, defeated “I guess so.”

Hannibal shook his head, “I understand, but I…” He let out a heavy sigh, frowning. “What if I change the deal? What if I need the personal guidance of someone already embedded within the community? A close… business relationship?”

“You said you never mix business and personal life…” Will replied, a little breathless. Because whilst he knew this could be bad if things didn’t work out, he was finding it so hard to resist the man.

Then Hannibal stepped forward again and Will didn’t move away this time. Hannibal placed a hand on Will’s hip and held him there. Not that Will resisted.

When Hannibal spoke, his lips hovered just above Will’s.

“These alternative plans, what if there was something in the fine print…” Hannibal moved a breath closer, their bodies pressing together.

Will swallowed hard.

“What if, a condition of this new deal, is that you go on a date with me. One date, so we can see whether it is worth pursuing. Give you a chance to consider whether you are comfortable with that. Or, we could simply live with the regret of what happened in college.”

Will let out an involuntary noise, a slight sound of distress at the thought of that regret.

And he knew, deep down, this wasn’t sensible. That they hadn’t even defined their business relationship, so how could they navigate something personal as well?

But with their bodies pressed together and the memories of that amazing night so fresh in his brain, Will found himself nodding. His mind full of how they would make this work. How he could already see the shit Abi would give Hannibal and was confident the man would take it all with a fond smile. How he could imagine them, as he had done all those years ago, exploring a relationship together, even now knowing the differences between their lives.

Will wanted that. He couldn’t take more hurt and regret, not when the answer was so simple.

“Yeah. Yes, deal. Deal.”

The words came out desperately and then Hannibal’s mouth was on his and his arms went around Hannibal’s neck.

Sealing the deal with a kiss.

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